

MINUTES

MANSFIELD PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, April 5, 2007

Council Chambers, Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building

Members present: R. Favretti (Chairman), B. Gardner, J. Goodwin, R. Hall, K. Holt, P. Kochenburger,

P. Plante, B. Ryan, G. Zimmer

Alternates present: L. Lombard, B. Pociask

Staff present: G. Padick (Director of Planning)

Chairman Favretti called the Special Meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING:

Application to amend the Zoning Regulations; Storrs Center Alliance and Mansfield Downtown Partnership, applicants, File #1256

Application to amend the Zoning Map to create a new Storrs Center Special Design District, Storrs Center Alliance and Mansfield Downtown Partnership, applicants, File #1257

Chairman Favretti opened the Continued Public Hearing at 7:03 for the above applications. Padick read into the record a 4-5-07 letter from Kevin McDonald, Vice Chair of the RPC of the Windham Regional Council of Governments. Padick listed the following communications that have been received and distributed to all members of the Planning and Zoning Commission:

- 4-5-07 letter from Haidous Family
- 4-5-07 letter from Kevin McDonald, RPC Vice President, WINCOG Regional Planning Commission
- 4-3-07 letter from Thomas Cody, Robinson & Cole
- 3-28-07 letter from UConn Co-op, William P. Simpson, President and COO
- 3-28-07 letter from Lucinda Weiss
- 3-28-07 letter from John T. DeWolf, UConn School of Engineering
- undated letter received 3-28-07 from Mrs. Mary Stearn

Chairman Favretti reviewed the procedures for conducting this Special Meeting.

Attorney Tom Cody, representing the applicants, introduced himself and members of the Downtown Partnership Project team.

At this time Chairman Favretti opened the floor to receive public comment.

Elizabeth Paterson, Mayor of Mansfield, 79 Independence Lane, outlined the history of the project from the beginning stages to the present, and gave her full support. She stated that Storrs Center will provide an opportunity to enhance the quality of life for all residents, with amenities such as shops, restaurants, housing and services. Also, Storrs Center will provide more positive leisure opportunities for students, offering positive alternatives to large off-campus parties and substance abuse.

Matthew Hart, Town Manager, expressed his full support for the two applications because of the many benefits the Storrs Center project will have for the community. More specifically, he emphasized that the Town has been a primary driver behind this project and is a key member of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership. Also, the development team has spared no expense in preparing this application and in preparing for the project in general. Where appropriate, town staff has thoroughly vetted their work and has hired its own consultants to conduct a peer analysis. The proposed process for approval of site plans, in which the Director of Planning would approve site plans after a Partnership public hearing and a review by town staff, would maintain a major Town role in overseeing the project. From a fiscal and economic perspective, this project will have a positive impact on the town of Mansfield. It will result in sustainable development with an expanded tax base for the Town, and will greatly benefit the local and regional economy. Storrs Center will provide an estimated \$1.8 M in net tax revenue to the Town during the development period, and at full build-out, an estimated net tax benefit of \$2.5 M, increasing thereafter by 3 % due to inflation.

Philip Austin, President of UConn, Oak Hill Drive, gave his and the University's full support and stated how this development will help the University and its needs, and that it also will build better Town/Gown relations. He commented on how well the Town and University have worked together in conjunction with the development team to make the project come to this point.

Ruth Moynihan, of 37 Farrell Road, expressed her support and noted that the developers have been very responsive to the input given to them regarding the effects on Mansfield residents and they have been more than willing to address issues that have arisen.

Irene Schein, owner of Storrs Automotive at 4 Dog Lane, spoke in favor of the proposal. She noted the development team's willingness to provide a relocation site and their responsiveness to residents' input.

Christine Schwab, of 85 Willowbrook Road, spoke highly of the proposal and how it will bring the community and families together. She also mentioned the opportunities the developers have given neighbors to express their concerns. She related that the mixed-use zoning is very compatible with the existing residences nearby. She is happy to see pedestrian/bike friendly development in the heart of the downtown and in close proximity to several civic/municipal buildings. These civic buildings, already on site, make for a better overall project.

Peter Millman, of 122 Dog Lane and a member of the project's Planning and Design Committee, was impressed by the developers who listened intently to suggestions and concerns of townspeople. The Planning and Design Committee has been an active participant in the creation of the proposed design guidelines and will be part of the review process for new buildings, together with the Director of Planning and Town staff.

Michael Taylor, of 12 Stonemill Road, noting that his concerns had been addressed in a letter from Attorney Cody, expressed his pleasure with the proposed project and the developers' involvement with the community.

Madge Manfred, President of Joshua's Trust and resident of 26 Puddin Lane, spoke in favor of the proposal because it promotes cluster housing and protects open space, in addition to being a positive way to bring the community together.

Robert Coughlin, of 49 Storrs Heights Road, spoke in support of the restaurants and the shopping but feels that housing may have a detrimental impact on Town services and quality of life. He felt the housing should fall under the Town's new housing code, and that the land not being developed should be protected by a conservation easement. Other concerns he expressed were about fraternity/sorority houses, private clubs, sports bars, traffic, the water supply from UConn, and that the project should be approved in stages.

Jackie Soroka, of Willowbrook Road, stated that she is happy to have this type of development near her residential community and it will be a place her children can enjoy safely. She feels the market and town squares are a favorable addition to Mansfield.

Joan Buck, of 6 Sumner Drive, questioned who/what entity will determine which commercial activities to be located next to the residential areas. It was pointed out that the submittal indicated mixed use as well as residential areas.

Sherrie Hilding, of Court Yard Square, expressed concern for the traffic on the Post Office Road, and questioned if the road leading in and out of the development via Post Office Road can be a secondary road instead of a primary one. She was concerned about the quality of life for people living at Court Yard Square. She also questioned if any new businesses can succeed in that location, since others have not.

Carol Phillips asked if there will be room for service vehicles loading and unloading, and will the backs of the buildings be attractive. Toledano responded that all buildings will face streets, there will be no back sides to them, and service vehicles will have designated areas.

Francis Pickering, of Willowbrook Lane, asked about the parking meter plan (if any) and suggested using a system that would discourage UConn and E.O. Smith students from parking at Storrs Center. He also expressed the need for bicycle crossings and accommodations, and that UConn has a bike master-plan that should be coordinated with the project's plans.

Helen Koehn, Town Council Member, felt it was important that the PZC receive UConn's Master Water Supply Plan prior to the closing of the Public Hearing. She stated that residents should have the chance to comment on the findings in the Water Supply Plan and the effect it will have on the proposed development.

Robert Coughlin, of 49 Storrs Heights, wondered if bicycle lanes are a part of the design and felt that the project should also address the junction Storrs Road, Flaherty Road and Hanks Hill Road.

There being no further comments from the public, Favretti asked for questions and comments from Commission members:

Zimmer related that he has continued concerns regarding phasing in relation to the completion of the road connection to the Post Office Road, and also about the standards or criteria for service vehicle parking.

Gardner asked if the town has fire apparatus to reach the tallest planned building. Hart indicated that Mansfield does not but does have a mutual aid agreement with UConn and they do have the appropriate apparatus. Fitzgerald responded that all buildings will have automatic fire-suppression systems.

Hall asked for clarification of proposed live music and boarding house uses. The applicant indicated a willingness to withdraw the request for boarding houses and but would like to keep live music, explaining that live music will be more thoroughly addressed at future hearings.

Kochenburger had questions about the Phase A1 building and when it would be built and how will the existing private businesses blocks be integrated into this plan, if at all. Cody responded that A1 will not be built until all approvals are in place for the entire project. He explained that the proposal provides an opportunity for the other property owners in the area to be reclassified.

Plante asked if there would be a private security force on site, especially to handle the minor police calls and false alarms that could potentially put a strain on the Town's fire/protection services. Toledano said that during construction they would have a security patrol and would consider the issue again after construction. Plante also wondered if any thought had been given to pedestrian/bike tunnels under Storrs Road to provide a safer crossing. The applicants' response was that pedestrian crossings had been extensively studied and that people typically ignore both tunnels and overhead crossings even if built and would take the shortest way by walking across the street.

Zimmer asked if consideration had been given to solar energy for heating and cooling. He was told that the applicants are using a green building concept and would consider solar where appropriate.

Hall questioned why existing buffer requirements aren't applicable. Cody responded that they want flexibility of design on a site by site basis and that buffering had been built into the design.

Goodwin asked about the zoning permit review process and whether the PZC would be abdicating its responsibility. She also asked about enforcement mechanism. Attorneys Cody and Cole-Chu provided lengthy responses, emphasizing that the text amendment is the enabling legislation, and that the Downtown Partnership is the Town's designated "Municipal Development Authority" for this district, acting as a 'sister agency' in place of the PZC, and that the Partnership will make sure the plans are implemented as per the submittal. Cole-Chu noted that the design guidelines and other application materials are very detailed. The actual construction plans will be reviewed by staff and the Partnership and that there will be opportunities for public comment.

Kochenburger and Holt also asked about enforcing the regulations now and in the future. Cole-Chu said that the ZEO and Director of Planning would do the enforcing based on existing statutes and Mansfield's Zoning Regulations. He noted that the PZC could change the zoning regulations if problems arise.

After a brief recess, the applicants responded more fully to a number of the previous questions. It was noted that they are willing to set aside the open space parcel under a conservation easement; that they want to relax the current alcohol ordinance's separating distances so that there could be a cluster of restaurants; that they are willing to re-

evaluate the parking study from time to time; and that they will provide more information about live music and signage issues.

Gardner had questions about the type of residents expected. Toledano explained that by creating different styles of units (apartments, lofts, condos, townhouses, single family homes) they are aiming for a wide variety of residents.

Favretti asked how the design guidelines would work with multiple architects. Richard Munday, applicants' architect, answered that because the plans describe the building patterns to be followed and not every detail, a developer may have flexibility but will need to adhere to the approved guidelines. He emphasized the guidelines focus on the public spaces.

Holt and other Commission members expressed concerned about the open space area and how to protect the vernal pool and the wetlands. Michael Klemens, project ecologist, noted that they would design a limited number of access points to trails and would direct people to the less environmentally sensitive areas. With a 100 foot buffer around the vernal pool, any viewing of it should be from a ridge-top trail and away from the pool. It was noted that the project will be subject to Mansfield Inland Wetlands Agency approval. Kochenburger noted that traffic will increase on side roads nearest the project and asked what will be done to alleviate traffic impacts. Discussion followed about traffic impacts from the project.

Padick responded to Gardner's question regarding the staff ability to handle the new responsibilities by explaining that staff was already very familiar with the plans and that he did not anticipate problems provided the approved plans were implemented as per PZC approval standards.

Pociask asked what will be the main energy source for new buildings. Toledano indicated that natural gas will be used. Pociask wondered if the supply pipe running through Storrs will be adequately sized to accommodate this development and was told that no service problems are anticipated.

Zimmer asked about plans for snow removal. Padick indicated that this issue was discussed by the Mansfield Traffic Authority and that the Town will truck snow off site.

Lombard questioned the applicants about the heights and proportions of the buildings. Munday related that the buildings were of human scale and would be similar to buildings on the UConn campus.

Kochenburger and others reiterated a traffic issue, questioning how the developers plan to protect the surrounding side streets from a large increase in traffic and the higher speeds on them. The applicants' team responded briefly.

Plante MOVED, Holt seconded, to continue the Public Hearing until 4/26/07. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Minutes:

Hall MOVED, and Gardner seconded, to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting, 3/28/07. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Adjournment:

Favretti declared the meeting adjourned at 10:35p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine K. Holt, Secretary